

Media, PA — In an address to the League of Women Voters of Central Delaware County, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7) today said that the War in Iraq continues to be the defining issue facing the United State Congress and he expressed his concern that pressing domestic issues are not adequately addressed with ongoing debate regarding the war, and the investment it takes. He emphasized that the top priority for Congress and the Administration is to set a reasonable timetable to redeploy troops and bring an end to the conflict.

— The Congressman described his proposal to establish a date-certain withdrawal plan which will enable the 160,000 U.S. troops and 50,000 civilian contractors to leave the country in a safe and orderly fashion. The Congressman estimates that the redeployment will take 15 to 24 months. He urged his fellow members of Congress to put aside their partisan differences, asking that the Democrats turn away from their “pure opposition to the war and calls for immediate withdrawal,” and that the Republicans “accept that the U.S. government must also work diplomatically with governments in the Middle East during this deliberate redeployment.”

“Our troops have served our country courageously and brilliantly, but our engagement in Iraq has degraded our security, pushing our Army to the breaking point so that it cannot confront other pressing security concerns at home and abroad,” the Congressman said.

Among the other issues that the Congress must focus upon, Congressman Sestak declared that Healthcare, Education, Energy, and the Economy should receive the highest priority.

Congressman Sestak has been a strong proponent of the Children’s Health Insurance Program legislation that has been twice vetoed by the President. “This legislation will provide health care for four million additional uninsured children from working families—in addition to the six million already covered under CHIP—who too often have medical conditions that go untreated because their families cannot afford to pay for out-of-pocket medical expenses or the exorbitant costs of obtaining private insurance when insurance is not offered by their employers.”

The Congressman told League members that he remains passionately committed to the passage of this legislation and will work closely with House members to ensure its eventual enactment.

As a member of the House Education and Labor Committee, and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, Congressman Sestak said he is proud of the

role he has played in reforming the federal Head Start program and reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. The Head Start legislation will provide access to the program for a larger number of disadvantaged children, while it addresses quality and accountability issues by requiring additional teachers to obtain Bachelor's degrees, and mandating that those programs that did not meet quality targets reapply for grants in direct competition with new applicants.

The Committee also voted recently to reauthorize the Higher Education Act with a provision requiring colleges and universities to provide information regarding changes to their tuition and fees. Congressman Sestak also voted for the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, a bill that was signed into law, to increase Pell Grant Scholarships from \$4,050 in 2006 to \$5,400 over the next five years, and to cut federal student loan interest rates from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent.

At the same time, he expressed disappointment that the Congress has not been able to reach agreement on the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. "The legislation has become mired in political debate that threatens our ability to establish a consensus on the educational priorities for our children," the Congressman said.

Congressman Sestak played a leading role in the drafting of a nine-point plan to amend and enhance the No Child Left Behind legislation, including provisions to improve test quality, allow states to use growth models that allow students to demonstrate progress over time, address provisions of the legislation that negatively impact children with disabilities and English Language Learners, and increase funding so that all schools have the resources they need to help children succeed.

The Congressman is working closely with House Education Committee Chairman George Miller to ensure that the NCLB Reauthorization legislation continues to move forward.

A significant priority for Congressman Sestak since taking office in January has been to address the needs of local businesses in the Delaware Valley. The Congressman is Vice Chairman of the House Small Business Committee and has held a series of four economic summits in the district which dealt with such topics as workforce development, resources for local small businesses, and addressing the challenges facing working women and women small business owners. This week, the Congressman hosted a summit on business procurement, designed to help small businesses in the region compete for state and federal contracts. Congressman Sestak said that assisting women-owned businesses successfully compete for government contracts is crucial part of this effort.

According to the House Small Business Committee, one-third of all businesses are majority owned by women and half of all businesses are partially owned by women. At the same time, women-owned businesses are awarded less than 3.5% of all government contracts. The Small Business Fairness in Contracting Act, which is pending before Congress, would increase this percentage to 5%. The Act also includes an amendment authored by Congressman Sestak which stops U.S. government agencies from unfairly bundling small contracts into "mega-contracts," a practice that makes it harder for small businesses—including women-owned businesses—to compete due to the size of the bundled contracts.

Energy and environmental issues continue to be a major focus of the 110th Congress and a particular priority for Congressman Sestak, he told members of the League of Women Voters.

On Thursday, December 6, Congressman Sestak voted for the Energy Independence and Security Act (H.R. 6). With its passage, Congress has taken a bold step towards reducing America's dependence on foreign oil and strengthening our national security, lowering energy costs, increasing America's supply of home-grown renewable energy, investing in cutting-edge research on renewable fuels, and reducing harmful pollutants to the environment.

H.R. 6 set historic fuel economy standards for new cars and trucks by raising Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards to 35 miles per gallon by 2020, the first increase by Congress since 1975.

The legislation also increases the Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS) to 36 billion gallons of renewable fuels in the market by 2022— a five-fold increase over the current standard. The expanded renewable fuels standard (RFS) requires 9 billion gallons of renewable fuels in 2008 and progressively increases to a 36 billion gallon requirement by 2022. H.R. 6 also requires a 15 percent national renewable electricity standard (RES), which will require electric utilities to use renewable energy to generate 15 percent of their electricity or to purchase renewable energy credits from others to meet this standard by 2020.

The bill also creates an Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Worker Training Program to train a quality workforce for "green" collar jobs -- such as solar panel manufacturer and green building construction worker -- created by federal renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives, which may create up to three million new jobs in the next ten years, and makes new

investments into research on biofuels and other alternative energy technologies.

Congressman Sestak has been also been a strong supporter of aggressive legislation to address climate change, including co-sponsoring two bills, the Safe Climate Act of 2007 (H.R. 1590) and the Climate Stewardship Act (H.R. 620) to aggressively reduce carbon emissions. Additionally, he voted to increase funding, \$24 million above the President's request in the Energy and Water Appropriation bill, for climate change research including: modeling using state-of-the-art super computers; monitoring radiation in the atmosphere; and long-term experiments on the impact of increased carbon dioxide levels on forests and other ecosystems.

Following the recent release of the United Nations Environment Programme Global Environment Outlook report, the Congressman addressed fears that—as stated in the report—“humanity is at risk” if we fail to take decisive action to address climate change, extinction rates, and hunger. “We must have moral leadership in Washington,” the Congressman said. “We must ensure that our next president makes the protection of our environment a signature issue for the next decade. I am confident that the people of this nation possess the resolve to work with our neighbors throughout the world to save our planet and provide our children and grandchildren with the future they deserve.”

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.*